



**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board  
held at AFBI Hillsborough  
on Tuesday 16 May 2017 at 10.00am**

**Present – Board Members**

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair	Mrs Fiona Hanna	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Prof William McKelvey, Deputy Chair	Dr Richard Horton	Mrs Sharon Smyth
Dr Michelle Costello-Smith	Ms Joan Houston	Mr Richard Solomon
Ms Theresa Cullen		

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Dr Sinclair Mayne, Chief Executive Officer  
Dr Stanley McDowell, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division  
Dr Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division  
Ms Lesley Johnston, (Acting) Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division

Mrs Lynsey Cooper, AFBI Secretariat

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**ACTION**

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Dr Magowan to her first Board meeting as Director of SAFSD.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of AFBI Board Members Mr Ian Buchanan and Mr Colin Coffey.

**3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration**

There were no conflicts of interest to be recorded.

**4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 2 March 2017**

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 2 March 2017 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

**4.1 Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 2 March 2017**

The Board noted the progress against actions as per the action sheet.

## 5. Chair's Remarks

**ACTION**

The Chair reported on the success of the Balmoral Show held on 10-13 May 2017 and the Board noted that good engagement was made with the public at AFBI's two exhibition stands. The Executive reported on plans already being considered for AFBI's representation at the 2018 Balmoral Show to improve the organisation's visibility.

The Chair informed members that the Strictly Boardroom "*Boardroom Apprentice*" scheme was set to commence in June 2017 and he would be requesting that a Board Member volunteer to act as a mentor and attend the launch event.

**Chair**

*Mr Solomon entered the meeting*

## 6. Executive Report

In presenting his Executive Report for the period 1 March – 30 April 2017, the CEO highlighted items which included the following:-

- Senior AFBI staff met with senior Ulster University (UU) staff on 12 April 2017 to discuss opportunities for closer AFBI/UU collaboration;
- Dr Magowan was appointed as Director of SAFSD on 1 May 2017. Recruitment competitions for the Director of FCAD and two Divisional and Business Administration Manager positions have been completed and appointees are expected to take up post in due course;
- AFBI was successful in bidding for a commercial supermarket contract as one of their "*preferred research providers*". The Board recommended that the Executive maximise this opportunity for external promotion of the AFBI brand;
- A marked increase in Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) testing by AFBI's laboratory had been observed with 370,000 ear notch samples processed in 2016/17 compared to 144,000 in 2015/16. The Board noted the average turnaround time of 24 hours for the reporting of results and expressed its appreciation for the effort of AFBI's staff in supporting the local industry through the BVD eradication programme;
- Dr Magowan received the prestigious Sir John Hammond Award from the British Society of Animal Science at its Annual Meeting on 26 April 2017. The award was presented in recognition of Dr Magowan's contribution in the area of pig research and the Board congratulated her on this significant achievement;
- The construction of the AFBI Hillsborough Nutrient Management Centre had been completed and the Board was pleased to note that this facility will be on view to stakeholders at the AFBI Open Day on 1 June 2017;

Following an update on the VSD Main Building project, the Board requested that the Executive inform the Department of its concerns regarding AFBI's involvement in the proposed governance arrangements.

**Exec**

The Board focused on the potential impact on AFBI's services as a result of ongoing delays in estates maintenance-related minor works projects and the Executive agreed to perform a risk assessment for the outstanding work.

**ACTION  
Exec**

## **7. Finance**

### **7.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 31 March 2017**

In presenting the “*AFBI Budget Monitor Report - Position as at 31 March 2017*” Ms Johnston advised the Board that the 2016/17 year end position was a surplus of £1,466k due to the unexpected additional royalty income in the latter part of the year, and that figures were being finalised with DAERA.

The Board scrutinised the tables and, subject to clarification of miscellaneous overheads, was content.

**LJ**

### **7.2 Vaccine Royalties Update**

Ms Johnston advised the Board that Queen's University Belfast (QUB) had reassured her of its focus on AFBI's royalty income and confidence in the review carried out by an independent specialist auditor. The Board was pleased to note that a revised royalty income forecast provided by QUB reflected income projected to 2023.

### **7.3 Quarterly update on new bids and contracts**

Ms Johnston presented the “*AFBI New Bids and Contracts Report*” which listed external business opportunities identified within Quarter 4 of 2016/17 and gave a detailed breakdown of their conversion into contracts. The Board welcomed the overall conversion rate of 71% for the year 2016/17. Following discussions, the Executive advised of its intention that this report would be further developed with the longer term aim of linking it to AFBI's Corporate and Science strategies as discussed at the Finance and Business Strategy Committee meeting on 5 May 2017.

## **8. Finance and Business Strategy Committee**

### **8.1 Minutes from Finance and Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 24 February 2017**

The Board noted the minutes from the Finance and Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 24 February 2017.

### **8.2 Report from Finance and Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 5 May 2017**

In the absence of Mr Coffey, Committee Chair, Mrs Hanna provided an update on the key issues discussed at the Finance and Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 5 May 2017, which included the following:-

- The Committee was assured by the year end budget paper and congratulated the Executive on the accurate reporting of outturn projections on expenditure during the year;

- The Committee was content with the realistic budget set for 2017/18 and the Executive had agreed to provide regular Star Chamber summary reports to members to aid the Committee's oversight throughout the year;
- The Executive had set up an Income Generation Strategy Group (IGSG) within AFBI which would initially focus on the generation of four-year budgets across the Institute to inform AFBI's Corporate Plan 2017/18 – 2021/22;
- The Executive had provided assurance that AFBI's Charging Policy would be prioritised.

LJ

The Chair directed the Finance and Business Strategy Committee to keep the Board informed in the event that the 2017/18 forecasted outturn starts to deviate from the agreed budget.

## 9. Science Strategy Committee

### 9.1 Draft Minutes from Science Strategy Committee meeting held on 23 March 2017

The Board noted the content of the draft minutes from the Science Strategy Committee meeting held on 23 March 2017 which included items highlighted by Dr Costello-Smith such as AFBI's Genomics Business Case, AFBI's Horizon Scanning Group and the 2016/17 Peer Review Implementation Plan Update.

The CEO tabled a paper titled "*Summary of AFBI's refereed publications April 2016 - January 2017*" which had been presented at the Committee meeting. This provided collated information on research publications by AFBI scientists and assessed the quality, as defined by impact factors and journal ranking in individual subject areas. The Board was pleased to note that 41% of papers had been published in, or submitted to, the top 10% of ranked journals and discussed related topics such as public relations, potential for intellectual property rights and methods to assess the impact of non-research outputs.

### 9.2 Executive Summary & Draft Review of AFBI Science Strategy 2014-2020

The Board approved the draft review of the "*AFBI Science Strategy 2014-2020*" and noted that further work was ongoing by the Executive and Science Strategy Committee to identify future opportunities using a new programme-based approach to AFBI science.

## 10. Report from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 4 May 2017

Ms Houston reported on topics discussed at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting held on 4 May 2017 and advised that a contract had been awarded to a new Internal Audit provider during a recent procurement exercise.

The Board noted that a 2016/17 Internal Audit report entitled "*Human Resource (HR) Management*" had received a "*Limited*" level of assurance and the Executive advised that this was due to an accumulation of minor issues and AFBI's HR Management Team had already made progress on actions to address the findings. The Board was content that there were no "*Priority 1*" findings.

## 11. Governance Issues

### 11.1 Risk Management

#### 11.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks*

There were no new or emerging risks reported.

#### 11.1.2 *Draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register (April 2017)*

Ms Johnston presented the draft “*AFBI Corporate Risk Register (CRR) – April 2017*” which had been scrutinised by AFBI’s Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on 4 May 2017 and drew the Board’s attention to the following key changes: -

- CR4 was completely refreshed to reflect the Executive’s view of the risk environment and the revised definition now reads “*Movements in exchange rates may have an adverse impact upon income levels*”;
- The definition of CR8 was also refreshed to read “*Failure to recruit and maintain the required staff complement with the right knowledge, skills and experience to support the delivery of science needs and ensure that AFBI can fulfil its work requirements for customer*”, which more accurately reflects the current position and the conclusion of the Voluntary Exit Scheme;

Following discussions and assurance from the Executive on AFBI’s mitigation against cyber attacks via the NICS government IT network, the Board approved the draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register.

### 11.2 Whistleblowing and Fraud

#### 11.2.1 *Reports of New or Ongoing Cases*

Ms Johnston reported on an external fraudulent attempted use of an AFBI Government Procurement Card. There was no loss to AFBI and no member of AFBI staff was involved.

### 11.3 Health & Safety

#### 11.3.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Issues*

There were no new or emerging cases reported.

#### 11.3.2 Health and Safety Review Update

Ms Johnston advised that a specialist auditor had been engaged to review Health & Safety within AFBI.

### 11.4 AFBI Policies

#### 11.4.1 *Revised Site Security Policy (Draft)*

The Board was content to approve the revised “*Site Security Policy*”. Following a query from a Board member, the Chair requested that the Executive consider the

provision of improved signage for AFBI sites and report a decision at the next Board meeting.

**ACTION  
Exec**

## **12. AFBI Board Annual Governance**

### **12.1 AFBI Board Self-assessment Report 2016/17**

The Chair reported on the analysis of the results of the 2016/17 self-assessment exercise which forms part of the Board's annual governance arrangements. Returns provided by fifteen Members were anonymised and overall results showed a positive response with no major concerns raised, although individual comments reflected matters such as the strategic and scientific focus of the Board. The Chair advised Members that he had requested further work to be carried out to analyse the opinions of the current 2017/18 Board Members and addressed the comments raised. The Board was content that the new 2017/18 format of separate meetings and workshops would focus attention on specific strategic topics and the Chair requested that the members advise him of any appropriate agenda items they wish discussed.

## **13. AFBI Business Plans**

### **13.1 Provisional KPIs Outturn for 2016/17**

In presenting the year end "*Provisional KPIs Outturn for 2016/17*", Ms Johnston reported that of 25 Corporate KPIs, 16 had been achieved, 6 were not achieved, 2 were on hold with the approval of the AFBI Board and 1 did not have outturn data available to date. The KPIs that were not achieved covered a range of matters such as the completion of DAERA Evidence & Innovation projects, reviews of critical business continuity plans and staffing arrangements, capital outturn spending and absenteeism targets. Following analysis of each, the Board was content with the justifications for the non achievement of these KPIs.

### **13.2 Draft AFBI Business Plan 2017/18**

The draft "*AFBI Business Plan 2017/18*" had been circulated to Board Members for comment prior to the meeting and the Board approved the final draft submitted to DAERA.

## **14. Review of Management Statement and Financial Memorandum**

Ms Johnston advised the Board of the minor changes to the reviewed "*Management Statement and Financial Memorandum*" (MSFM) which had been provided by DAERA to AFBI for consultation. Following the Executive's assurances regarding any limitations imposed on AFBI's scope for future business development, the Board agreed with the changes including the Executive's proposal to amend the delegated limit for the disposal of surplus equipment within Appendix A (paragraph 6) of the Financial Memorandum. The MSFM is to be returned to DAERA for final agreement.

**Exec**

**15. AFBI Equality Scheme 2013-2018 Action Plan Progress Report (Oct 16 –Mar 17) ACTION**

The Board was content with the “*AFBI Equality Scheme 2013-2018 Action Plan Progress Report (Oct 16 – Mar 17)*”, noting the completion of all outstanding actions and the intention to set new targets for 2017/18 which will include additional training for staff and holding policy review meetings with the Equality Commission.

**16. Any Other Business**

**16.1 Proposal for AFBI Open Day – Thursday 1 June 2017**

The CEO advised the Board of the agenda for the AFBI Open Day to be held on 1 June 2017 at AFBI Hillsborough and highlighted items included the following:-

- The theme would be “*Progress through Research and Innovation*”;
- A keynote address given by an invited industry leader would focus on the importance of research and innovation in dairy systems;
- Three AFBI speakers would be complemented by 3 industry speakers;
- Topics presented would include Grasscheck, Bovine Tuberculosis and Fish Stock Assessment Data;
- Stakeholders would be given the opportunity to meet with AFBI’s scientists and visit the AFBI Hillsborough Nutrient Management Centre.

The Board approved the proposal.

**17. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness**

The Board considered that it had held an effective meeting.

**19. Date of Next AFBI Board Meeting**

The next AFBI Board workshop will be held on Thursday 29 June 2017 at QUB.

The next AFBI Board meeting will be held on Thursday 21 September 2017 at 10.00am in AFBI Newforge.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_